

Sermon for Lent 2 2021

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Mark 8.31.

We are now on our way to Easter and there is no better sign of this than Jesus telling the disciples that he is to suffer, be rejected, be killed and that he will rise from the dead after three days. This is the foretelling of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ.

We might ask the question regarding his identity, "Is he really the Christ, the Messiah?" There were many times the same question was asked in scripture. In this same chapter Jesus asks the disciples who people say that he is, and they suggest that some say that he is John the Baptist, others say that he is Elijah, some simply say that he is a Prophet.

The important question is the punch line to this conversation, "But who do **you** say that I am?" It is Peter who leaps into the silence and declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the chosen one of God. Jesus does not correct him. In not correcting Peter, Jesus is identifying himself as the Son of God. He is the one who has come to bring freedom to the people. He is the one who will open the door to the kingdom so that all who believe may enter and stand before God. And as we stand before God we will be forgiven, reconciled, and blessed.

When Jesus tells the disciples all that awaits him in Jerusalem, Peter is horrified. In his thinking there would be no hope for the group if it became known that the leader spoke in such defeatist terms. Peter immediately takes Jesus aside and begins to chastise him for saying this negative, defeatist, awful, idea.

We find that in a very short time Peter moves from the very top of the list of disciples. Remember when he told Jesus that he believed him to be the Messiah Jesus stated that Peter was blessed because he would only know that because the Father had revealed it to him.

Now he plunges to the depths with the demand from Jesus to get behind him. Not only is he rejected by Jesus, Peter is accused of being Satan. "Get ye behind me Satan." The reason for this clash is that Peter is thinking like a man, a human. He is not thinking like God.

This must have been very confronting for Peter. In the space of a few verses he is recognised as blessed by God and then plunged into the world of the deceit of the devil. "You are thinking as a man. You are not thinking of God." You are thinking of the here and now, not of the eternal plan of the creator."

It is a trap that we can find to be present in our lives. Far too often we can be snared with the events that are happening around us in the here and now. We worry about the stuff that went wrong yesterday, we panic about what might happen tomorrow, and we find it very difficult to accept that all that happens around us is a part of an eternal plan. Perhaps I could make that a little plainer. God's plan is active and vital, and it is very much a part of our lives.

It is when we stop and meditate on God; it is when we stop and pray with God; it is when we come to understand that in this life the only stable and true relationship is that of God with his creation. It is the relationship between God and his people; between God and each one of us. Everything else in our lives is temporary. When we depart this earthly life, the only constant will be our love of God and God's love for us.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Jesus instructs all who would follow him to deny themselves and to pick up their cross. Our cross is not some peculiar hardship that we live with in this life, it is our sharing in the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. We are to suffer with him, and we are to be raised to life with him. The cross we carry is our constant reminder that Our Lord died for our salvation.

If Jesus, through love for us, died for our salvation, we can be encouraged by Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. In the reading this morning Paul is instructing the Thessalonians that they are to live in a manner that will please God. Paul begins by teaching that anyone who is a disciple of Christ must first and foremost concentrate on the cross of Christ. The cross is the primary teaching of Paul, everything else flows from this fundamental identification of the sacrifice of Christ.

Paul speaks of abstaining from lustful passion so that our bodies will honour God. Just as important is the instruction that we are not to exploit our brother or sister. When we live a Christian life, a life focussed on the saving grace of God, then we are committed to respecting and honouring the people with whom we share our earthly life.

When Jesus spoke of his forthcoming passion and death, he was not being morbid or defeatist. He was saying plainly that his obedience to the Father would ensure our salvation. Just as he was obedient to the Father, so are we to be obedient to Christ.

As we begin this Lenten Journey may we always give thanks for the resurrection of Easter, for that first resurrection is both his and ours.